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ABSTRACT

This review of the status of English language instruction in Sierra Leone provides an overview of the role of English in the society in general and outlines the status of English use and instruction in the educational system at all levels (preprimary, elementary, secondary, higher, vocational, adult, and teacher education). Topics covered are: the characteristics and training of English language instructors, the type and availability of instructional materials, educational administration and planning in relation to English teaching, British and other international support, commercial opportunities related to English instruction, creative writing, language research, and other sources of information. Although English maintains its role as the common language and the first official language, high standards of usage are giving way to a more functional and less correct form of English, and political and ethnic influences have polarized English and native language usage. An organizational chart of the ministry of education and a list of recommended books for eight levels and for teachers are appended. (MSE)

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ENGLISH TEACHING PROFILE

Country: Sierra Leone

Date: March 1986

1. ROLE AND STATUS OF ENGLISH

For historical reasons, English is the official language of Sierra Leone. English and the indigenous languages co-exist in a relationship known as diglossia; this means that English is a lingua franca for the educated classes, who may (and usually do) speak Krio and/or one of the many tribal languages at home or outside their work place. Certainly, for the majority of the Western Area Creoles, English has first-language status and much prestige is attached to a polished proficiency in the language. English is the everyday language of education, commerce and the professions, and standards are high.

Krio is the language of the Western Area Creoles and has become a lingua franca over the years. It is a rich and colourful mature language, and has a flourishing literature. For social and political reasons there is now a move to raise the status of the other thirteen or so indigenous languages: it is government policy to introduce tuition in the mother-tongue at the primary level of education. On the academic front, linguistic research is being carried out into these languages and orthographies are being developed. The principle languages (in terms of population size) are Mende, Temne and Limba.

English literature thrives in Sierra Leone. The classics are read and studied at school, leading to the West African Examinations Council (WAEC) General Certificate of Education examination in English literature. This is equivalent (in content) to the British GCE examination. The British literary heritage is warmly cultivated in Sierra Leone, where a knowledge of English literature is one of the hallmarks of an educated person. At the level of reading for pleasure, however, light historical romantic fiction is far and away the most popular form; the readership is predominently educated and female.

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The public library system is run by the Sierra Leone Library Board which provides books in English along the lines of a typical British library, but is handicapped by shortage of money and lack of access to foreign exchange. Although there is a nationwide system of branch libraries, problems of finance and communications have led to its deterioration over recent years. The major educational institutions have central libraries, but suffer from the same problems as the Sierra Leone Library Board. New books are nowadays only obtainable from finance provided by external aid agencies.

2. ENGLISH WITHIN THE EDUCATION SYSTEM

There are a small number of pre-primary schools in Freetown. These are private institutions which cater for the children of affluent and educated families.

Formal English teaching within the state sector begins at the age of five; there is a seven-year study cycle leading to a selective examination for entry to secondary school. The primary school English syllabus is called 'language arts'; it includes language, drama, poetry and prose.

Secondary education

English is a core curriculum subject in nearly all schools. Syllabuses are approved and monitored by the Ministry of Education; innovation and development are provided by the Institute of Education, which is a department of the University of Sierra Leone.

The study of English in the secondary sector is largely based upon the role learning of set textbooks with the WAEC examinations in mind. The chronic shortage of textbooks and facilities in schools encourages this approach; many teachers attempt to transcend the old-fashioned methodology, but it is culturally ingrained and the lack of alternative materials hinders the effective development and implementation of new ideas.

Tertiary education

Degree courses in English are offered by the University of Sierra Leone. In the past, the English proficiency of incoming students equipped them with the basic skills to proceed directly to undergraduate studies for an honours degree, but this is no longer the case. The secondary sector now produces students many of whom lack the language skills needed for degree-level study. Entry to tertiary education institutions is not entirely based on proven merit or examination results, and this exacerbates matters.

As in Britain, the secondary education sector is largely a graduate profession; the exception is the HTC (Higher Teachers Certificate) awarded by the Milton Margai Teachers College, the country's only institution for the preparation of teachers for secondary school teaching. Graduates of the University of Sierra Leone may spend a postgraduate year in the Department of Education at Fourah Bay College to obtain a postgraduate diploma in education.

Vocational training

There is little provision for formal English tuition in the vocational training sector, but many teachers in this area find themselves undertaking remedial English work to develop essential study skills in their trainees.

There are several active adult literacy programs under way in Sierra Leone; these are achieving good but limited results, due to the endemic problems of communication and poverty. The government takes a serious view of the illiteracy problem and is committed to a radical improvement of the present situation, but lacks resources to tackle the problem effectively at the moment.

Teacher training

Language arts are taught as part of the teacher's certificate course offered by the country's five colleges which prepare teachers for the primary sector.

Background information

Success in English is a formal requirement for advancement within the educational system. A pass at the WAEC O-level examination is a matriculation requirement for entry to tertiary education.

The average secondary school-leaver, regardless of the formal qualification obtained, is literate. It should be borne in mind that a great many able children, especially in the provinces, are compelled to abandon their formal education because of family poverty or the need to assume the role of head of the family. Life expectancy being low, this frequently happens to boys in their teens when the father dies or is incapacitated by one of the many diseases endemic to the west coast of Africa. A young person who has completed studies up to form four will probably possess basic reading and writing skills.

The number of young people actually completing the cycle of primary and secondary education is very small indeed. Accurate and up to date statistics are impossible to come by, but conservative estimates put the drop-out rate at the primary level as high as sixty percent; in the secondary sector, it may be as high as eighty percent. The watershed seems to be form four in the secondary school, beyond which children are committed to preparation for the WAEC examinations, the attendant expense of which is beyond most Sierra Leonean families.

Inspection of schools is carried out by an Inspectorate run by the Ministry of Education. There are twelve district inspectors serving under three provincial area senior inspectors. Effective inspection is handicapped by the wide dispersion of small rural communities and the lack of communications. There is also a shortage of inspectors in the provinces. The Inspectorate is, though, a professionally competent body, and many inspectors have had training in Britain under the Technical Co-operation Training Programme funded by the Overseas Development Administration (ODA). The Western Area has its own Inspectorate based in the Ministry of Education in Freetown. There is close involvement with individual subject teachers and joint participation in workshops and seminars conducted by the Institute of Education, which has overall responsibility for curriculum matters and the teacher training syllabuses. Subject panels organized by the Ministry of Education meet at the Institute to determine the primary English syllabus and textbook requirements.

Educational broadcasting is not functional in Sierra Leone at present. Although there are some trained and competent professionals, constraints of money and technology prevent the use of their skills and knowledge; even in the Western Area, schools do not have televisions (or even radios). In the provinces it is very difficult to receive radio broadcasts from the Freetown transmitter, which has severe and chronic technical problems. There is the further factor of the lack of electricity supplies.

3. TEACHERS OF ENGLISH

In 1978, the last year for which published figures are available, the profile of teachers in the primary sector who were qualified (Q), partly qualified (PQ) and unqualified (UQ) was as follows:

	Q	PQ	UQ
Males	2141	547	2607
Females	637	291	866

The problems posed by the proportion of unqualified staff are a matter of concern. In 1978, the five training colleges for primary teachers produced only 278 certificated teachers, but the output is now being increased to meet the problem. All the trained output from these sources will have studied language arts, of course.

In the secondary sector, the single Milton Margai Training College produced eleven Higher Certificate awards containing English studies in 1978. Fourah Bay College awarded twenty BA degrees with English studies, and Njala University College awarded six BEd degrees containing English studies.

Again using the figures for 1978, the profile of the secondary teacher population was as follows:

Professionally qualified				Unqualified		
Graduates	Higher Teachers Certificate	Other	Total	Graduates	Non-Graduates	Total
A Sierra Leoneans						
187	105	56	348	21	70	91
B Expatriates						
44	2	3	49	13		13

The overall output of trained secondary teachers from both university and college sources was 269 in 1978.

The wastage of secondary English teachers for 1977 was:

Qualified			
Graduates	Higher Teachers Certificate	Others	Total
17% of 200	11.25% of 125	4.3% of 47	13.4% of 372
Unqualified			
18.1% of 11	None	47.3% of 55	42.4% of 66

More than 10% of qualified staff leave employment within the year and these figures can be compared with teacher production levels previously described. The volatile nature of the smaller unqualified section will be evident.

Further training of practising teachers rests initially with the local inspectorate but the Ministry of Education has little recurrent funding for these purposes. The Key English Language Teaching (KELT) project involves seminars and workshops for primary school inspectors and teachers involved in primary English teaching. The in-service co-ordinator at the Institute of Education organizes in-service training (with funds from overseas sources) several times a year. The Sierra Leone Association of Teachers in English meets occasionally.

4. MATERIALS SUPPORT

The official book lists for both primary and secondary schools are provided in Appendix C. Because of the crisis in foreign currency the official book ordering system for schools has broken down, and now students and parents must manage as best they can. Wealthy parents with access to currency purchase textbooks for their children from overseas; those without, buy essential books secondhand from the many street traders who deal in academic books. Many children are reduced to sharing or borrowing books, and copying by hand. The bookshops sometimes manage to obtain copies of standard texts, but too erratically to meet the demand and at a price that is beyond the means of most parents. There can be no doubt that the textbook crisis is having a deleterious effect on education at all levels, especially at the university and teachers colleges.

Institutional libraries hold stock which is often out of date and badly dog-eared. Mutilation of books is common. The loss-rate of books is high and worsening. Security in the schools is difficult to maintain, and even in the largest institutional libraries theft of books is common.

In Freetown the main resources for students and teachers are the Sierra Leone Library Board, the library of the Institute of Education, the University Library, the British Council Library and the United States Information Communication Agency (USICA) Library. The Library Board and the University Library now rely almost entirely on external aid donations to replace old and purchase new stock. The Institute of Education is building up a resource centre, largely with aid funds.

The ODA Book Presentation Programme is being used to support institutional libraries, at a rate of £35,000 per year. This is by no means lavish aid, but is a realistic figure in terms of the number of institutions that are supported and the rate at which books can be accessioned and securely shelved.

The Bunumbu Teachers College is the centre for a United Nations Education and Scientific Co-operation Overseas (UNESCO) project in community education, and a considerable amount of printed material is ready for dissemination to selected schools. The Bunumbu curriculum strategy is, however, broadly incompatible with the core curriculum adopted by the Ministry of Education, and at the time of writing major work is under way to reconcile and harmonize these two largely antithetical systems. The Institute of Education is taking a leading role in this co-ordination, and the KELT Project team is closely involved in the English teaching curriculum development. There is connsiderable British interest in these developments as the ODA is currently financing the provision of primary school textbooks to a total of almost 1.5 million pounds.

To stimulate and develop the capacity to produce teaching materials, the ODA funded a materials development post in the Institute of Education for two years. Book Presentation money has been used to support this and other resource centres in the country's teachers colleges. The most active and effective centre is at Makeni Teachers College. Under the leadership of an American Peace Corps person and with the active support of ODA financed KELT and Mathematics Project staff, this centre is now providing invaluable aid to students, local teachers and district educational inspectors.

5. EDUCATIONAL ADMINISTRATION IN RELATION TO ENGLISH TEACHING

The organization of the Ministry of Education is shown in Appendix A together with a chart (Appendix B) showing the Ministry's functional relationships.

Control of the formal education system is vested in the Minister who answers to the Cabinet, the Vice Presidents and the President.

A great deal of control of finances and policy making is centralized in the Ministry of Freetown but there is a trend towards some decentralization of activity to the three regional provincial education officers. The professional head of the Ministry is the Chief Education Officer, assisted by a Deputy and an Assistant Chief Education Officer. There are major professional divisions which cater for interests in primary Education, Secondary Education, Teacher Education, Technical/Science Education, Educational Planning. Each section is under the control of a Principal Education Officer. The administrative sections of the Ministry are controlled by the Permanent Secretary.

Various non-government bodies and agencies are still concerned with formal education in Sierra Leone. Before the abolition of the twelve District Councils, they participated in the local education authority system which was responsible for primary education. Even now, the local committee of management in Freetown, as opposed to the Ministry itself, still maintains the functions of the primary schools which are under its control. In the countryside, the United Christian Council, the Roman Catholic Mission and the Sierra Leone Muslim Congress liaise with the Ministry of Freetown through their respective education secretaries.

At the level of university, the Ministry is represented at Court Senate and in other key committees there; similarly there is representation on the College Council of Milton Margai College. The Minister is also represented for similar purposes on the committees of the five primary training colleges and the government secondary schools.

6. DEVELOPMENT AND PLANNING OF THE TEACHING OF ENGLISH

As a coastal trading country under British influence since the eighteenth century, Sierra Leone has a long tradition of English teaching. The threads that make the skein of this tradition are religious, commercial and colonial. The teaching of English in the hinterland to enable newly-converted Christians to study the Bible was a major concern of the missionaries. The growth of commerce, and especially the establishment of the great trading companies, created a need for literacy in English. And the colonial government under the Protectorate (declared in 1896) fostered the teaching of English to provide the executive and administrative cadre for the nascent civil service.

The result of these forces was the creation of an English-speaking elite based in the Western Area. The expectancy was that the sons and daughters of these families would, if they wished to follow careers in medicine, the law or the liberal arts, go to study in Britain. This strengthened ties between the two countries, and emphasized the predominence of English.

After 1925, colonial thinking shifted towards the provision of education not as a means of maintaining British influence, but as a tool for national development. There was a shift towards technical education. By 1944 education was moving towards training for democratic participation by the citizen in national affairs, and preparation for leadership.

Since independence in 1961, there has been a steady development of curriculum diversification as required by manpower training programmes with English as the medium of instruction.

In 1970 a White Paper on education took a broad overview of education in Sierra Leone, considering character development as well as manpower training. English literature was felt to be a necessary component of secondary education, for its cultural and moral values and the contribution it made to a rounded education.

Times are changing. Britain can no longer rely upon the historical hegemony of the English language in Sierra Leone. There is a growing and vocal Muslim influence spreading from the north, and other nations are seeking to establish influence through aid and commerce. China, France and Russia in particular are putting resources into Sierra Leone, and Korea is providing educational training. And as the internal balance of power shifts inexorably from the Western Area Creoles to the inland tribal groupings, there is a growing demand for status for the indigenous languages. In time, English will have second-language status for the majority of Sierra Leoneans; the process is being accelerated by the lack of essential textbooks and recreational reading material in English caused by the economic decline of the country. The lack of a consistent and continuous television service, even in the nation's capital, is another significant factor in this decline. Britain's influence, in linguistic terms, is on the line.

Important policy documents relating to the status and teaching of English in Sierra Leone, are:

The White Paper on Educational Development	1958
Report of the Educational Planning Group	1961
The Ten-Year Plan for Economic and Social Development	1962
The Development Programme for Education	1964
The White Paper on Educational Policy	1970

Most of these papers are only available for reference in libraries.

7. ENGLISH OUTSIDE THE EDUCATION SYSTEM

Because of the existing status and predominence of English, there is no significant activity outside the state education system.

8. BRITISH SUPPORT FOR THE TEACHING OF ENGLISH

British input is currently being provided in manpower and materials. There is a KELT Project, the aim of which is to revitalize primary-level English teaching throughout the country. KELT Officers have been located in each of the country's four teachers, colleges, at Port Loko, Makeni, Bo and Freetown. As the Project approaches its final phase, the KELT Adviser post based in the Ministry of Education and the post of Port Loko Teachers' College have been withdrawn. The Project Officers are lecturers in their respective colleges, and work closely with the district educational Inspectorates on in-service training. They also liaise with the Curriculum Development staff at the Institute of Education and are involved in the introduction of the new primary-level English language textbooks under the ODA/IDA Textbook Project as well as developing a new syllabus for teacher training.

The growing global interest in the teaching of English literature is being supported in Sierra Leone by the provision of literature teaching specialists within the Specialist Tour programme. The KELT Officers are working towards the study of literature as a significant component of the language arts curriculum. The British Council library in Freetown is increasing stocks of modern literature in English so as to be able to meet the expected upturn in demand for these materials, and individual colleges have had considerable support in this area under the ODA Book Presentation Programme.

9. AMERICAN SUPPORT FOR THE TEACHING OF ENGLISH

There is no direct American involvement in the teaching of English in Sierra Leone, other than within the Peace Corps programme. It is, however, significant that USICA has recently undertaken a massive redevelopment and expansion of its library and resource centre in Freetown, and is expanding considerably both its cultural and its scholarships programmes.

10. OTHER AGENCY SUPPORT

The KELT Programme is heavily involved in the IDA/ODA Textbook Project, and works closely with other agencies involved in the provision of educational aid to the English teaching sector.

There is formal co-operation with Peace Corps and Canadian University Service Overseas (CUSO) in the KELT Project, and close links have been forged with the Bunumu (UNESCO) Project through its director, who is based in the Institute of Education. There is efective liaison and full co-operation between these agencies and the British Council.

11. COMMERCIAL OPPORTUNITIES

At present, there are virtually no commercial opportunities because of the currency problem.

12. CREATIVE WRITING

There is considerable interest in creative writing in Sierra Leone, but the present economic depression and the imposition of censorship laws seriously inhibit any major flowering of literature. Local dramatists write plays in Krio, and have adapted Shakespeare with considerable success. There is a growing awareness of the rich oral tradition, and an effort is being made to record and transcribe folk tales and songs before they become extinct. This movement could have interesting results, as the songs and fables are now being introduced into primary education along with the indigenous languages. The Arts Association of Sierra Leone is fostering this awareness by organizing cultural events for young children, involving music, dance and drama.

13. CURRENT RESEARCH

Research resources are being channelled, quite rightly, into the study of indigenous langauges. There are some able people producing good work, and - with assistance, whenever possible, from the British Council - presenting the results of their research at conferences and symposia in Britain.

The linguistic approaches being followed in research are British in bias, rather than American; this reflects the tendency for Sierra Leoneans to study in Britain during their formative years. The Americans are out to change this.

14. BIBLIOGRAPHY AND SOURCES OF FURTHER INFORMATION

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15. GENERAL STATEMENT

The role and status of English in Sierra Leone is undergoing a profound change, for reasons already outlined above.

English will certainly always have a role as lingua franca, especially for the professional classes in their communications with the outside world. But the present high standards of culture and literacy are already giving way to a more functional and less 'correct' form of English, even in the Western Area.

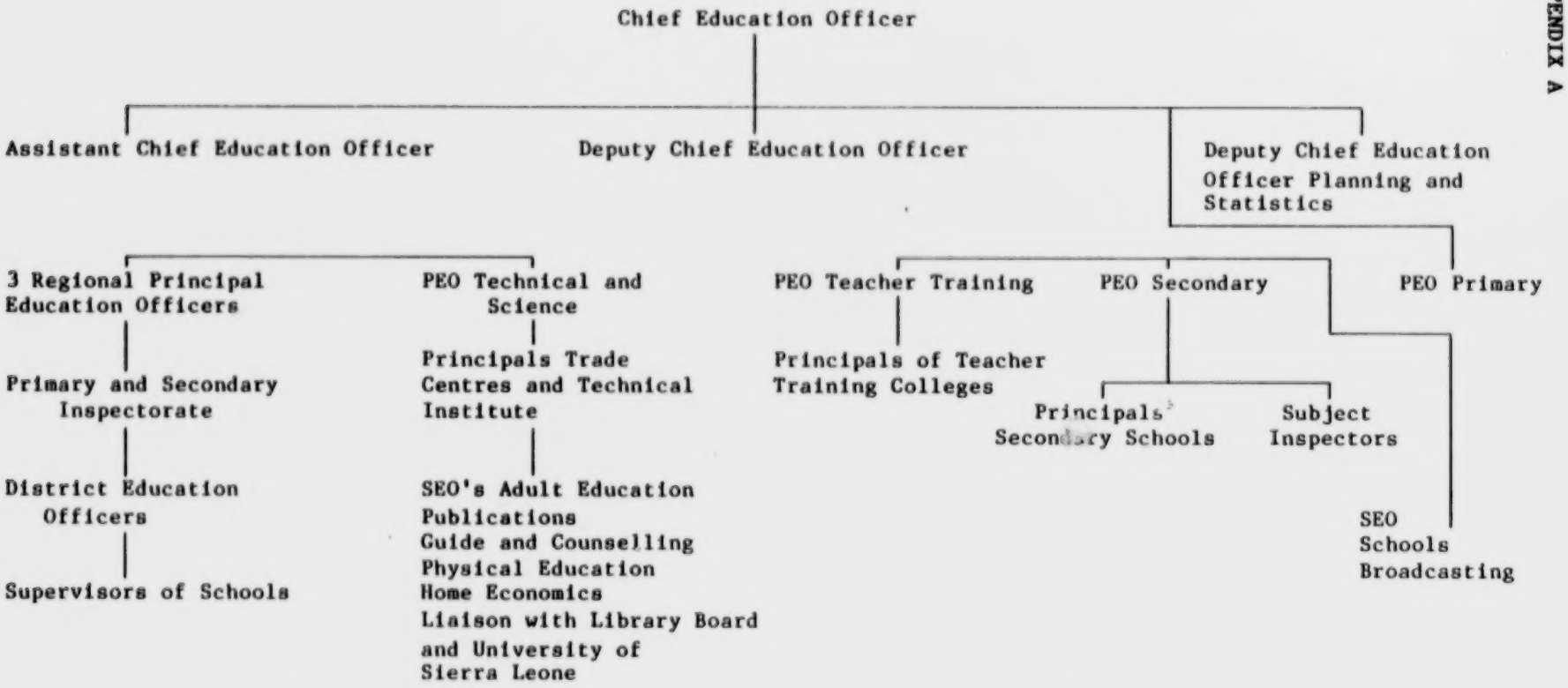
The development of pan-Africanism will rely, inevitably, upon the use of English as a common language between states. However, for many people in the area (though not the great majority of Sierra Leoneans) the use of the language of their old colonial masters is seen as - at best - a necessary evil. This polarization emerged very clearly at a recent conference on African literature in Britain: creative writers are torn between writing in their own tribal or national language and writing in English because, although their native language is capable of expressing very vividly and precisely their feelings and emotions, this choice precludes the wide readership that their work deserves.

In a sense, then, Sierra Leone is a microcosm. English is still in a strong and dominant position, but attitudes and loyalties are changing. The great strength of English teaching in Sierra Leone is the present generation of dedicated and enthusiastic teachers; but there are signs already that the next generation may not be as tolerant of the incredibly difficult teaching situations that exist throughout most of the country, nor accept the salaries offered to the profession. Able young people are already leaving in growing numbers.

APPENDIX A

Ministry of Education

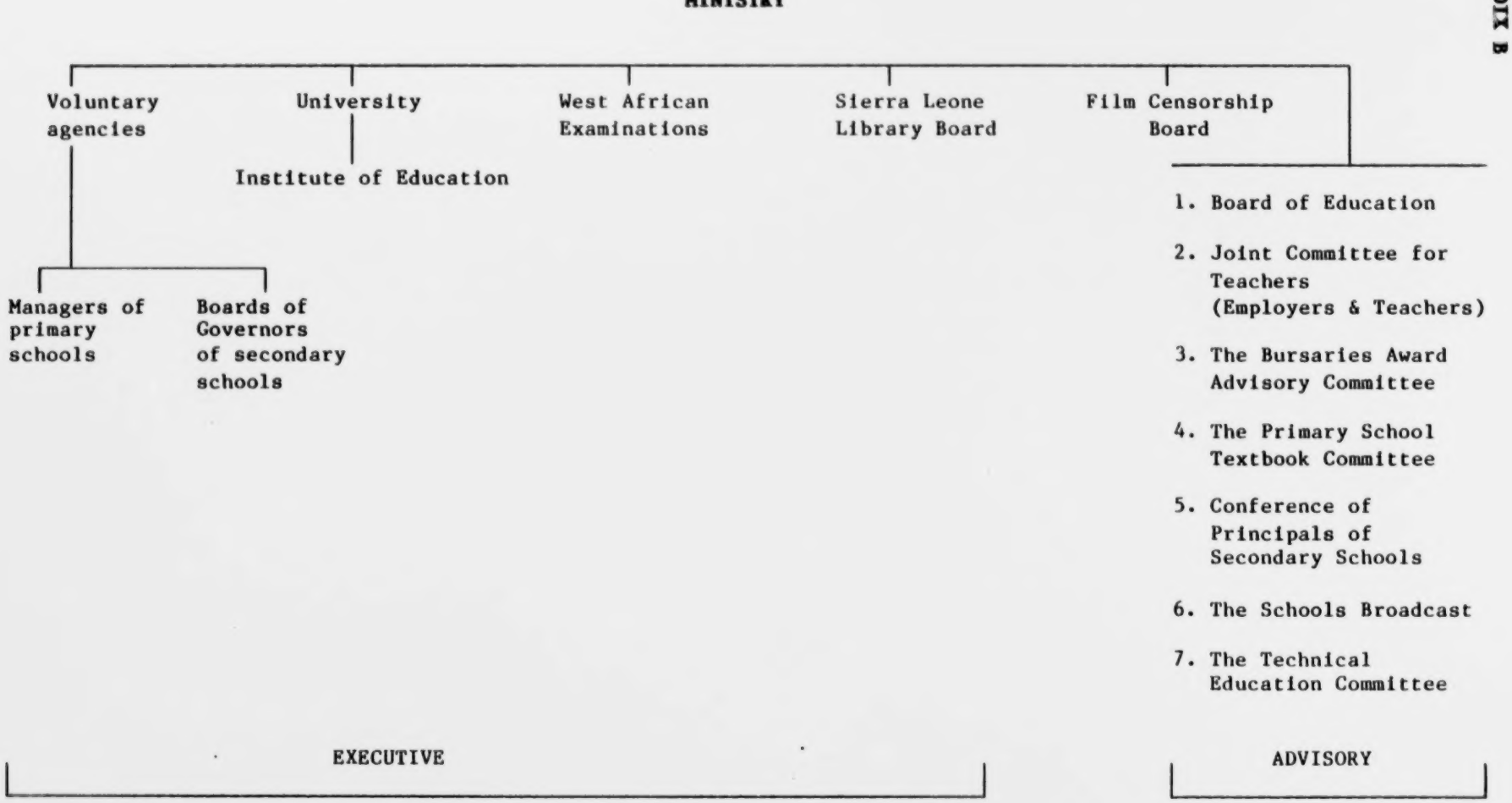
Professional Services



APPENDIX B

The Ministry of Education

Administration of education - link with controlling agencies



APPENDIX C

Primary schools
Recommended book list for the next five years

No.	Class	Books	
1.	I	New Maths Book I	
		English Course Book I	Longmans
		or	
		English Course Book I	Evans
1.	II	New Maths Book I	
2.		New Maths Book II	
3.		One English Course Book I	
4.		English Course B II	Longmans
		or	
		English Course Book II	
5.		English Course Workbook	Evans
1.	III	New Maths Book II	
2.		New Maths Book III	
3.		English Course Book II	
4.		English Course Book II	Longmans
		or	
		English Course Book III	Evans
5.		English Course Workbook	
6.		Pictorial Dictionary	
1.	IV	New Maths Book III	
2.		Sierra Leone Primary Maths Book IV	
3.		English Course Book III	
4.		English Course Book IV	Longmans
		or	
		English Course Book IV	Evans
5.		Pictorial Dictionary	
6.		English Course Workbook	
7.		One Literature Book	
1.	V	Sierra Leone Primary Maths Book IV	
2.		Sierra Leone Primary Maths Book V	
3.		English Course Book IV	
4.		English Course Book V	Longmans
		or	
		English Course Book V	Evans
5.		English Course Workbook	
6.		Dictionary Michael West	
7.		Sierra Leone Atlas	
8.		One Literature Book	

1.	VI	Sierra Leone Primary Maths Book V	
2.		Sierra Leone Primary Maths Book VI	
3.		English Course Book V	
4.		English Course Book VI	Longmans
		or	
		English Course Book VI	Evans
5.		English Course Workbook	
6.		New First Aid in English	
7.		Objective Questions and Answers in Arithmetic I & II	
8.		Objective Questions and Answers in English I & II	
9.		Intelligence Test Papers I	
10.		Sierra Leone Atlas	
11.		Dictionary	
12.		One Literature Book	
13.		One Geometry Set	

1.	VIII	Sierra Leone Primary Maths Book VI	
2.		Sierra Leone Primary Maths Book VII	
3.		English Course Workbook	
4.		English Course Book VI	
5.		English Course Book VII	Longmans
		or	
		English Course Book VII	Evans
6.		Selective Entrance English and Verbal Aptitude Test by Joe Allie	
7.		New First Aid in English	
8.		Sierra Leone Atlas	
9.		Dictionary	
10.		Geometry Set	
11.		Preparing for Secondary School Arithmetic	
12.		Preparing for Secondary School English	
13.		One Literature Book	
14.		Overseas Poetry by Ann Berry	

TEACHERS BOOKS

Teachers Guide to go with all the Course Books
Rhymes of our Land
Sierra Leone Primary Geography
Our Sierra Leone Book I
Our Sierra Leone Book II
Civics for Sierra Leone Book I & II